

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

DIVISION OF STATEWIDE PLANNING

TONY KNOWLES, GOVERNOR

3132 CHANNEL DRIVE
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99801-7898
PHONE: (907) 465-4070
TEXT: (907) 465-3652
FAX: (907) 465-6984

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Alice Ruby
Director of Operations
Choggiung Limited
P.O. Box 330
Dillingham, AK 99576

Dear Ms Ruby:

Thank you for your letter concerning your general view that the effort to formulate a regional transportation plan for Southwest Alaska has not fairly and fully considered all sub-areas within the region. Since the arrival of your letter, and several others making a similar point we have slowed the planning process down and will offer such communities a more thorough chance for consideration.

Specifically, we will be presenting the plan's status at the December meeting of the BBNC. There has also been time set up after the formal meeting for communities to voice their concerns face-to-face. In addition, we have tasked the consultant to slow down, revisit these issues and take into account many of the project ideas and increased public participation you mentioned.

I would like to clarify one point you made. We have not forgotten the road work to Aleknagik nor the planned bridge. In fact, the plan deliberately considered these projects already in the delivery pipeline, thus not needing to be slowed down or reevaluated. I think you can see that slowing down such projects in order to make them face a new decision-making process would have been the more disruptive scenario.

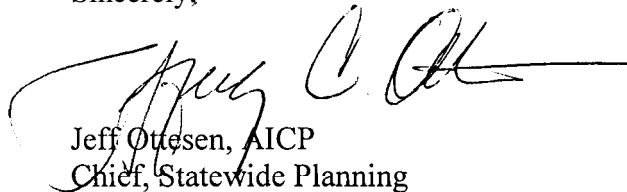
I would also like to respond to the points made on the second page of your letter:

- Improve participation process – yes, we will make further outreach such as the already planned December meeting. We are also willing to come, when invited.
- Include a phased approach to projects - undoubtedly, the final plan must consider a phased approach. The great distances, high first costs and low population density simply demand this approach.

- Include roads, airports and ports that are in the vicinity of existing communities – that is precisely what the regional plan is all about. The Dillingham airport you mentioned is considered one of several regional “hub” airports identified in the plan. In addition, we intend to apply the approach to airport improvements developed for the Yukon-Kuskokwim Transportation Plan to the Southwest Transportation Plan. This approach takes into account trends in aircraft design and availability, air carrier service patterns, and expected growth in passenger and freight demand to determine if and when improvements in a particular facility are warranted. It’s clear that we have done quite a bit of work that is not visible to folks such as yourself. We need to make improvement here.
- Identify and include partnerships – This is an implementation issue, and will be addressed, in part, in the plan. The coordination and synergy of efforts among several entities involved in rural transportation was a central theme expressed during a rural transportation planning workshop attended by many of our planners as well as several other organizations. And yes, in concept, the department is very supportive of such partnering to achieve needed transportation. At a recent meeting of the Alaska Miners Association I made the following point: “Federal law now permits more partnering and public-private ventures than state government is probably comfortable with. The challenge is upon us to become more flexible.” I think this statement supports your point, and our recognition that such partnerships are possible and beneficial.

At this time no official recommendations or decisions have been made, in draft or final form. I believe you will see us slow down, take more time for input, and formulate a thorough plan that fulfills regional expectations. I thank you for taking the time to write and look forward to continuing the dialog.

Sincerely,



Jeff Ottesen, AICP
Chief, Statewide Planning